



United States Department of State

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MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION LIST A

FROM: Otto J. Reich *DM*

SUBJECT: Background Paper: Nicaragua's Military Build-Up and Support for Central American Subversion

On the occasion of the five-year anniversary of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, we are sending out a paper which reviews two of the most important activities in which the Sandinistas have engaged since they gained power on July 19, 1979: a rapid military build-up and support for subversion in Central America. Enclosed is a copy of a paper on these subjects, which I hope you will find interesting and informative.

Also enclosed are talking points on the paper, which may be useful in discussion of our policies toward Nicaragua or Central America in general.

Lastly, I think you will find the paper's "Conclusions" section helpful, especially if you don't have the opportunity to read the entire paper.

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NICARAGUA'S MILITARY BUILD-UP
AND
SUPPORT FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN SUBVERSION

Talking Points

- Since the Sandinistas gained power in July 1979, they have built the largest and best equipped military force in Central America.
- They have a 48,800-man active-duty armed force. A total of about 100,000 men have been trained and could be mobilized rapidly.
- The rapid growth of Nicaraguan military strength could not have been possible without the help of about 3,000 Cuban military/security advisers, many of whom are deeply involved in the decision-making process in Nicaragua.
- A total of about 9,000 Cubans are in Nicaragua now. About two-thirds of these are "civilian", and most are males of military age.
- The Soviet Union, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Libya have military and/or civilian advisers in Nicaragua. Also, international groups, including the PLO, Argentine Montoneros, Uruguayan Tupamaros, and the Basque ETA all have offices or representatives in Nicaragua.
- The Sandinistas have developed an extremely potent offensive capability, with firepower and mobility unprecedented in Central America.
- Nicaragua now has about 120 Soviet-made tanks and 120 other armored vehicles. By contrast, Honduras has 16 armored vehicles. Costa Rica has no army; much less any tanks, and El Salvador, while having a few dozen armored personnel carriers, does not have tanks.
- Most of the Sandinista rank and file, and some former Sandinista leaders, such as Eden Pastora Gomez, appear to be genuine nationalists. But the nine members of the Sandinista National Directorate, the center of power in Nicaragua today, are all Marxist-Leninists.

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- Many Nicaraguans who now oppose the Sandinistas were active in the struggle against Somoza and did not oppose the Sandinistas until the military build-up was well underway and the Sandinistas showed no intention of allowing a democratic system, including peaceful opposition, to develop.

- The evidence of Nicaragua's efforts to subvert and destabilize neighboring democratic governments includes communications centers for Salvadoran guerrillas, safehouses, arms depots, vehicle shops, training camps, and assistance in transporting military supplies to Salvadoran and other Central American guerrillas via air, land, and sea.

- El Salvador has been the principal target of Nicaraguan subversion, but Costa Rica and Honduras have also been subjected to armed attacks, bombings, attempted assassinations and other violent activity.

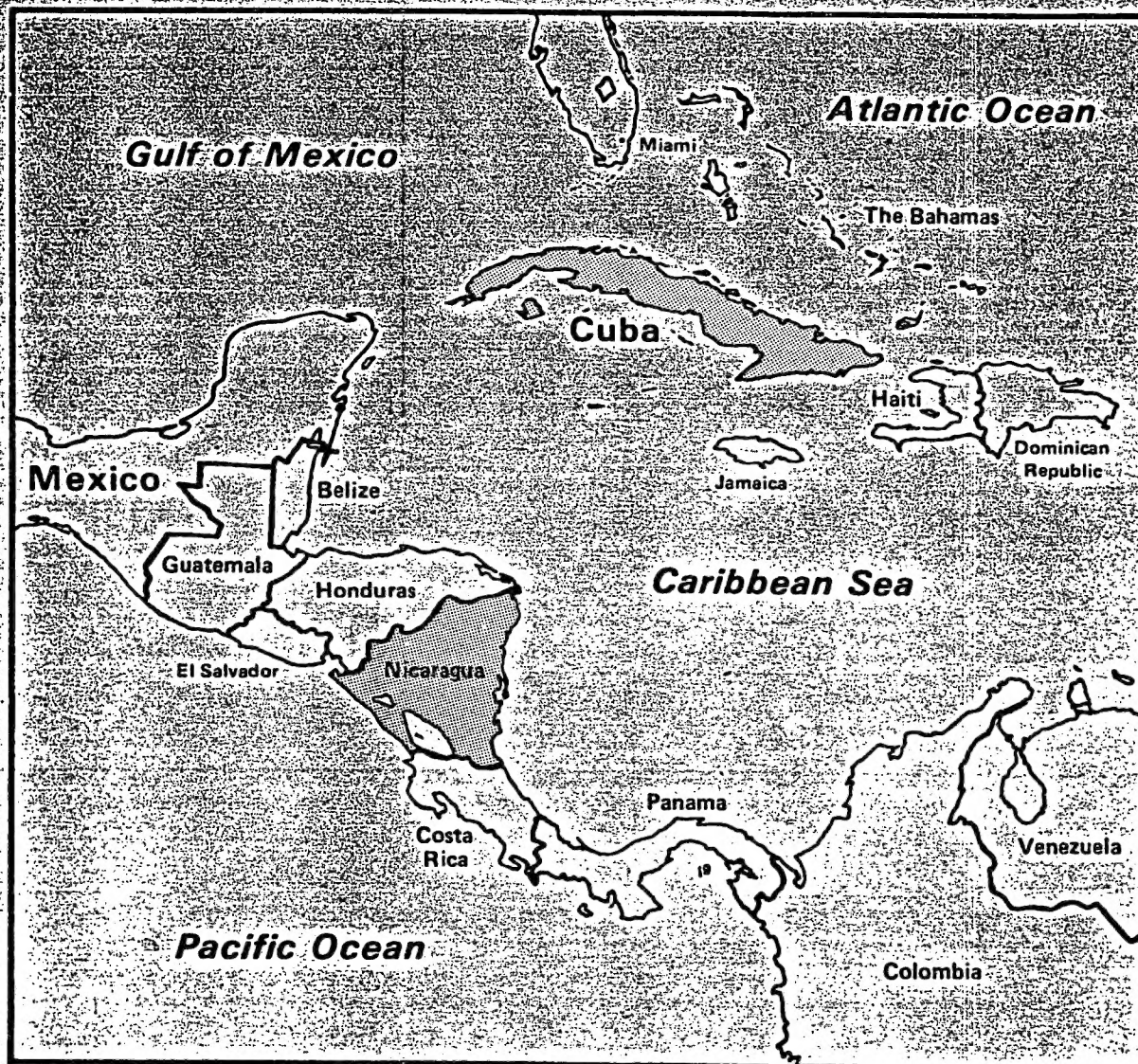
- This paper cites Sandinista documents, press reports, and interviews with captured guerrillas and defectors, but intelligence sources also have provided thousands of individual pieces of information that support the conclusions of the report.

- We have not cited specific intelligence reports because of the potential consequences of revealing sources and methods.

- Statistics provided in the report, such as the number of tanks in the Sandinista arsenal, are based on intelligence information, unless specific sources are identified.



BACKGROUND PAPER: NICARAGUA'S MILITARY BUILD-UP AND SUPPORT FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN SUBVERSION



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